Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Competitiveness (Research)

(2 February 2018, Sofia)

The future of R&I in Europe: investing in human capital

The Union's competitiveness, economic growth and job creation is closely linked to its research and innovation capacity. The same goes for tackling pressing societal challenges. However, the European Union will only be able to maximise the economic and societal contributions of R&I if it has a sufficient number of appropriately skilled scientists and researchers. In particular in the light of demographic developments and the global talent competition, Europe's education and research systems have to attract young, talented and motivated people more than ever before. Furthermore, these young talents need to be provided with a system that adequately rewards them at all career stages.

Moreover, ongoing changes in the field of research and innovation itself, but also more broadly in the dynamism of economies and societies at large, mean that greater demands are being made of researchers. Because businesses and citizens expect tangible results from research, converting new knowledge into innovation and bringing new products, processes and services to the market are all the more important now. Researchers therefore need to be equipped with a minimum set of entrepreneurial skills and/or have gained experience in creative and entrepreneurial environments. Consequently, we need to open up the scientific world to better share research results and data. At the same time, trans-national and inter-sectoral mobility and inter-disciplinary collaboration are increasingly recognised as benefitting not only individual researchers, but also research systems and their impact, as they promote wider, cross-sectoral knowledge-sharing.

In addressing the human capital dimension of research and innovation in the European Union, we are not starting from scratch. Since the start of the century, the European Research Area (ERA) policy has provided an increasingly rich framework for work by research performing organisations and regional and national governments. In this context, for instance, the 2005 Commission recommendation¹ to Member States on the 'European Charter for Researchers' and on a 'Code of Conduct for their recruitment', and the linked Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, are tools aimed at achieving an open EU labour market for researchers and the free movement of knowledge (5th freedom).

In terms of EU funding instruments for training and mobility of researchers, Horizon 2020, with the European Research Council, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, all boost entrepreneurship education.

¹ 7321/05 (C(2005)576 of 11/03/2005)
At national levels, the latest ERA progress report\textsuperscript{2} shows that, compared to 2014, more attention is being paid to open, transparent and merit-based recruitment procedures. Potential measures to further facilitate the international mobility of researchers include equal access to national research funding programs for foreign researchers, and increasing the portability of research grants. Additional measures include the further development of human resources procedures in research performing institutions. The transferability of pension rights and language competency for teaching requirements are evolving topics.

However, action cannot be limited to the world of research alone. Appropriate links should be established between research and innovation policies on the one hand and higher education policies on the other so that these two policy fields operate in tandem, in a mutually supportive symbiosis. Establishing successful collaborative relationships and developing joint training and mentoring opportunities between academic and economic sectors for talent at all career stages is important to ensure the efficient exploitation of training and research results, to measure the impact on society, and to engage with citizens in science.

To achieve this, an R&I skills strategy would be very welcome: it could focus on digital, Open Science and entrepreneurship to optimise the benefits of research collaboration by fostering training, coaching and guiding of research talent to boost economic growth. To this end, more political attention could be paid to the acquisition of digital, Open Science and entrepreneurship skills by researchers and research data-stewards and the provision of transparent rewarding mechanisms for them.

Against this background, Ministers at the Informal Council are invited to explore best practices and possible common (new or improved) measures to ensure the availability in the coming years of a sufficient number of mobile and appropriately skilled scientists and researchers across the European Union on the basis of the following questions:

- How can we realise a more systemic approach to ensure that researchers possess the necessary skills to link up with business and industry?

- How could a possible European Professional Researchers’ Career Development Framework boost attractiveness of a research career and achieve more optimal brain circulation?

- How can we further foster career development and skills acquisition in the EU Framework programme for R&I (FP9) and other next generation EU funding instruments such as Erasmus+, ESF and ERDF?